

What's making Danielle so moody?

Danielle has been very touchy lately. She snaps at her brother. She snaps at everyone. Yet when I tell her off, she often bursts into tears and complains, "I never do anything right. You're always picking on me!" Then she goes off to her room and sulks. This has been happening more and more. She will mope around for a while and then get cranky again and start picking fights with her brother. Danielle used to swim and play soccer, but she doesn't want to anymore. Now she is having problems at school too. I got a note from her teacher to say that she had an argument in class and left the room. Danielle just says school is boring.



Is Danielle depressed?

It's possible so further investigation would be wise. An ongoing pattern of irritable behaviour can be a sign of depression. Being depressed is not just being sad or unhappy. It is more serious.

A child who is depressed may...

- have low energy and be difficult to motivate
- lose interest easily in an activity they usually enjoy
- make negative comments about themselves
- look for what's wrong rather than see the positives in situations
- be very difficult to please
- be easily annoyed or upset
- cry easily and be difficult to soothe
- either have no interest in food or overeat
- have trouble sleeping

Children affected by depression need to feel supported and understood.

Getting moving is important to help them feel better, so try to keep up activities they enjoy. This can also help to show them that life is not all gloom and doom.

How parents and carers can help

- Help children open up by making time to listen to them talk about school, friends and home.
- If unsure how the child is feeling—ask! If they say "Don't know", suggest some feeling words and see if any hit the mark with them.
- Help children to get moving by making sure they have engaging activities and are not left to worry.
- Physical activity is a natural antidepressant. Encourage physical activities, such as walking, running, roller-blading, bike riding, swimming – anything that's physical will help.
- Don't wait too long for 'down' moods to become happy moods. If the change of mood is very severe or goes on for a while without improving, take action. Make an appointment with a doctor or a mental health professional.

Depression affects children's thinking as well as their mood and their behaviour. They may think they are worthless or that things will never get better. Children who are affected by this kind of negative thinking need help. Counselling can help them learn skills to tackle the depression and get back to feeling better about themselves and about their lives.

Help!

Are you worried your child is a bit like Danielle?

Parents and carers who are concerned that their child may need help should seek advice.

- Ask to speak to the school psychologist or counsellor.
- Talk to your doctor and ask to be referred to a children's mental health expert.
- Talk to your child's classroom teacher about ways to support him/her at school.

A diagnosis of Depressive Disorder is made when...

- 1 There is a marked change from the child's previous behaviour or it is not what you would expect at this age or for this child.
- 2 The behaviour is seen in more than one situation and the depressed mood colours everything the child does.
- 3 The behaviour causes problems at home, school and with friends, and the difficulties seriously interfere with the child's ability to get on or to enjoy themselves.

Sometimes children who are depressed talk about wanting to kill or hurt themselves. Suicide is rare in very young children but does happen occasionally with school age children. If children talk about deliberately wanting to hurt themselves or end their lives it should be taken as a serious concern. They need help from a qualified person with experience in treating children for depression.

Further information about depression in children is available in the KidsMatter resource pack, *Children with depression*.

The following web pages may also be of interest:

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=141&id=1920

www.chw.edu.au/healthykids/

for information on depression in children in languages other than English. Available in written and audio formats.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter trial. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

